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OXFORD
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THE
WOODEN PEGASUS

BY
EDITH SITWELL
Author of "Clowns' Houses"; Editor of "Wheels"

OXFORD
BASIL BLACKWELL
1920

TO

HELEN ROOTHAM

OSBERT SITWELL

SACHEVERELL SITWELL

AND

W. T. WALTON

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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SINGERIE

SUMMER afternoon in Hell !
Down the empty street it fell,
Pantaloon and Scaramouche—
Tongues like flames and shadows louche—
Flickered down the street together
In the spangled weather.
Flames, bright singing-birds that pass,
Whistled wares as shrill as grass
(Landscapes clear as glittering glass),
Whistled all together :
Papagei, oh Papagei,
Buy our greenest fruits, oh buy,
Melons misty from the bloom
Of mellow moons on some hot night,
Melting in the August light ;
Apples like an emerald shower ;
Nectarines that falling boom
On the grass in greenest gloom ;
Peaches bright as parrot's feather
Glistening from the moon's bower ;

SINGERIE

Chequered like fritillaries,
Fat and red are strawberries.
Parrot-voices shrill together—
Now they pelt each monkey-face
(Pantaloon with simian grace)
From the soft gloom till they smother
Both the plumèd head-dresses
With the green fruit-gems that glitter
(Twinkling sharp sounds like a zither).
Sharp each bird-tongue shrills and hisses,
Parrot-voices shrieking bane ;—
Down comes every spangled shutter
With a sudden noise like rain.

THE AVENUE

IN the huge and glassy room,
Pantaloon, with his tail-feather
Spangled like the weather,
Panached, too, with many a plume,
Watched the monkey Fanfreluche,
Shivering in his gilded ruche,
Fawn upon the piano keys—
Flatter till they answer back,
Through the scale of centuries,
Difference between white and black.
Winds like hurricanes of light
Change the blackest vacuums
To a light-barred avenue—
Semitones of might and right;
Then, from matter, life comes.
Down that lengthy avenue
Leading us we know not where,
Sudden views creep through the air;
Oh the keys we stumble through!
Jungles splashed with violent light,
Promenades all hard and bright,

THE AVENUE

Long tails like the swish of seas,
Avenue of piano keys.
Meaning comes to bind the whole,
Fingers separate from thumbs,
Soon the shapeless tune comes :
Bestial efforts at man's soul.
What though notes are false and shrill—
Black streets tumbling down a hill ?
Fundamentally
I am you, and you are me—
Octaves fall as emptily.

MANDOLINE

DOWN in Hell's gilded street,
Snow dances fleet and sweet,
Bright as a parokeet,

Or Punchinello,
All glistening yellow,
As fruit-jewels mellow,

Glittering white and black
As the swan's glassy back
On the Styx' soundless track,

Sharp as bird's painted bill,
Pecking fruit, sweet and shrill,
On a dark window-sill.

See the glass house as smooth
As a wide puppet-booth . . .
Snow strikes it like a sooth

MANDOLINE

Melon-shaped mandoline
With the sharp tang and sheen
Of flames that cry, "Unclean!"

Dinah with scarlet ruche,
Gay-plumaged Fanfreluche,
Watch shrill as Scaramouche

In the huge house of glass
Old shadows bent, alas!
On ebon sticks now pass—

Lean on a nigger boy
Creep like a broken toy—
Wooden and painted joy.

Trains sweep the empty floors—
Pelongs and Pallampores,
Bulchauls and Sallampores,

Soundless as any breeze
(Amber and orangeries)
From isles in Indian seas.

Black spangled veils falling
(The cold is appalling),
They wave fans, hear calling

MANDOLINE

Adder-flames shrieking slow,
Stinging bright fruit-like snow,
Down in the street below;

While an ape, with black spangled veil,
Plum'd head-dress, face dust-pale,
Scratch'd with a finger-nail

Sounds from a mandoline,
Tuneless and sharp as sin :—
Shutters whose tang and sheen,

Shrieking all down the scale,
Seem like the flames that fail
Under that onyx nail,

Light as snow dancing fleet,
Bright as a parokeet,
Down in Hell's empty street.

"COMEDY FOR MARIONETTES"

(To I. C. P.)

TANG the sharp mandoline!
Hail, falling in the lean
Street of Hell, sweeps it clean.

Under the puppet booth,
Down in Hell, see the smooth
Snow bright as fruit and sooth.

Cherries and plums all freeze—
Rubies upon the trees,
Rubied hail falls through these,

Pelting each young Snow Queen—
(A swan's breath, so whitely seen,)
Flirting her fan in lean

Streets, passing to and fro,
White as the flamelike snow,
Fruit of lips all aglow

"COMEDY FOR MARIONETTES"

As isles of the cherry
Or ruby-sweet berry
All plump sweet and merry.

Mantillas hide the shame
Of each duenna dame,
(Fans made of plumes of flame,)

Pelted with coral bells
Out of the orchard hells,
(Hail with sweet fruitage smells).

Now on the platform seen,
Hoofs clatter with the clean
Sound of a mandoline. . . .

Under the tinsel sun,
See shadow-spiders run !—
Fatter than any bun,

Beelzebub in a chair
Sits on the platform there ;
Candles like cold eyes stare.

"Master has got the gout,"
Adder-flames flare and spout
From his lips . . . shadows rout.

"COMEDY FOR MARIONETTES"

Tiptoe the Barber crept,
On his furred black locks leapt.
Candles shrieked, flaring wept.

Barber takes up the shears . . .
" Fur for the shivering fears,
Cold in Hell these long years."

Candles shriek up the scale,
Creaking down in a wail.
Hear how their protests fail !

Only cold, snakish flutes
Sound like the growing fruits
Out of slow hidden roots. . . .

Strange eyes a moment stare,
Fruit-like and moon-like glare,
From the bright shutters where

Hail, falling in the lean
Street of Hell, sweeps it clean.
Tang the sharp mandoline !

FALSETTO SONG

WHEN I was young, in ages past,
My soul had cast
Man's foolish shape,
And like a black and hairy ape—
My shadow, he
Now mimics me.
Follows slinking in my shade
Through the corridors of life
(Stifling 'twixt the walls I made
With the mud and murderous knife),
Takes the pulse of my black heart,
Never once controls my will,
Apes me selling in the mart
Song-birds hate did kill.

EVENTAIL

LOVELY Semiramis
Closes her slanting eyes :
Dead is she long ago.
From her fan, sliding slow,
Parrot-bright fire's feathers,
Gilded as June weathers,
Plumes bright and shrill as grass
Twinkle down ; as they pass
Through the green glooms in Hell
Fruits with a tuneful smell,
Grapes like an emerald rain,
Where the full moon has lain,
Greengages bright as grass,
Melons as cold as glass,
Piled on each gilded booth,
Feel their cheeks growing smooth.
Apes in plumed head-dresses
Whence the bright heat hisses,—
Nubian faces, sly
Pursing mouth, slanting eye,

EVENTAIL

Feel the Arabian
Winds floating from the fan :
Salesmen with gilded face
Paler grow, nod apace ;
" Oh, the fan's blowing
Cold winds . . . It is snowing ! "

FIFTEEN BUCOLIC POEMS

I

WHAT THE GOOSEGIRL SAID ABOUT THE DEAN

TURN again, turn again,
Goose Clothilda, Goosie Jane !

The wooden waves of people creak
From houses built with coloured straws
Of heat ; Dean Pappus' long nose snores—
Harsh as a hautbois, marshy-weak.

The wooden waves of people creak
Through the fields all water-sleek ;

And in among the straws of light
Those bumpkin hautbois-sounds take flight,

Whence he lies snoring like the moon,
Clownish-white all afternoon,

WHAT THE GOOSEGIRL SAID

Beneath the trees' arsenical
Harsh wood-wind tunes. Heretical—

(Blown like the wind's mane
Creaking woodenly again)

His wandering thoughts escape like geese,
Till he, their gooseherd, sets up chase,
And clouds of wool join the bright race
For scattered old simplicities.

II

NOAH

NOAH, through green waters slipping
sliding like a long sleek eel,
Slithered up Mount Ararat and
climbed into the Ark,—
Slipping with his long dank hair ; and sliding
slyly in his barque,
Pushed it slowly in a wholly glassy creek until
we feel
Pink crags tremble under us and wondrous
clear waters run
Over Shem and Ham and Japhet, moving with
their long sleek daughters,
Swift as fishes rainbow-coloured darting under
morning waters . . .
Burning seraph beasts sing clearly to the young
flamingo Sun.

Note.—Thanks are due to Helen Rootham for her earnest collaboration in this poem.

III

THE GIRL WITH THE LINT-WHITE LOCKS

THE bright-striped wooden fields are edged
With noisy cock's crow trees, scarce fledged—
The trees that spin like tops, all weathers,
Like strange birds ruffling glassy feathers.

My hair is white as flocks of geese,
And water hisses out of this;

And when the late sun burns my cheek
Till it is pink as apples sleek,

I wander in the fields and know
Why kings do squander pennies so—

Lest they at last should weight their eyes!
But beggars' ragged minds, more wise,

Know without flesh we cannot see—
And so they hoard stupidity

(The dull ancestral memory
That is the only property).

They laugh to see the spring fields edged
With noisy cock's crow trees scarce fledged,

And flowers that grunt to feel their eyes
Made clear with sight's finalities.

IV

THE LADY WITH THE SEWING MACHINE

ACROSS the fields as green as spinach,
Cropped as close as Time to Greenwich,
Stands a high house ; if at all,
Spring comes like a Paisley shawl—

Patternings meticulous
And youthfully ridiculous.

In each room the yellow sun
Shakes like a canary, run

On run, roulade, and watery trill—
Yellow, meaningless, and shrill.

Face as white as any clock's,
Cased in parsley-dark curled locks,

THE LADY WITH THE SEWING-MACHINE

All day long you sit and sew,
Stitch life down for fear it grow,

Stitch life down for fear we guess
At the hidden ugliness.

Dusty voice that throbs with heat,
Hoping with its steel-thin beat

To put stitches in my mind,
Make it tidy, make it kind ;

You shall not ! I'll keep it free
Though you turn earth sky and sea

To a patchwork quilt to keep
Your mind snug and warm in sleep.

V

BY CANDLELIGHT

HOUSES red as flower of bean,
Flickering leaves and shadows lean!
Pantalone, like a parrot,
Sat and grumbled in the garret,
Sat and growled and grumbled till
Moon upon the window-sill,
Like a red geranium,
Scented his bald cranium.
Said Brighella, meaning well—
" Pack your box and—go to Hell!
Heat will cure your rheumatism."
Silence crowned this optimism.
Not a sound and not a wail—
But the fire (lush leafy vale)
Watched the angry feathers fly.
Pantalone 'gan to cry—

Could not, *would* not, pack his box.
Shadows (curtseying hens and cocks)
Pecking in the attic gloom,
Tried to smother his tail-plume . . .
Till a cock's comb candle-flame,
Crowing loudly, died : Dawn came.

VI

SERENADE

THE tremulous gold of stars within your hair
Are yellow bees flown from the hive of night,
Finding the blossom of your eyes more fair
Than all the pale flowers folded from the light.
Then, Sweet, awake, and ope your dreaming eyes
Ere those bright bees have flown and darkness dies.

VII

CLOWNS' HOUSES

BENEATH the flat and paper sky
The sun, a demon's eye,
Glowed through the air, that mask of glass;
All wand'ring sounds that pass

Seemed out of tune, as if the light
Were fiddle-strings pulled tight.
The market square with spire and bell
Clanged out the hour in Hell.

The busy chatter of the heat
Shrilled like a parokeet;
And shuddering at the noonday light
The dust lay dead and white

As powder on a mummy's face,
Or fawned with simian grace
Round booths with many a hard bright toy
And wooden brittle joy:

CLOWNS' HOUSES

The cap and bells of Time the Clown
That, jangling, whistled down
Young cherubs hidden in the guise
Of every bird that flies ;

And star-bright masks for youth to wear,
Lest any dream that fare
—Bright pilgrim—past our ken, should see
Hints of Reality.

Upon the sharp-set grass, shrill-green,
Tall trees like rattles lean,
And jangle sharp and dizzily ;
But when night falls they sigh

Till Pierrot moon steals slyly in,
His face more white than sin,
Black-masked, and with cool touch lays bare
Each cherry, plum, and pear.

Then underneath the veilèd eyes
Of houses, darkness lies,—
Tall houses ; like a hopeless prayer
They cleave the sly dumb air.

Blind are those houses, paper-thin ;
Old shadows hid therein,
With sly and crazy movements creep
Like marionettes, and weep.

Tall windows show Infinity ;
And, hard reality,
The candles weep and pry and dance
Like lives mocked at by Chance.

The rooms are vast as Sleep within :
When once I ventured in,
Chill Silence, like a surging sea,
Slowly enveloped me.

VIII

THE SATYR IN THE PERIWIG

THE Satyr Scarabombadon
Pulled periwig and breeches on:
"Grown old and stiff, this modern dress
Adds monstrously to my distress;
The gout within a hoofen heel
Is *very* hard to bear; I feel
When crushed into a buckled shoe
The twinge will be redoubled, too.
And when I walk in gardens green
And, weeping, think on what has been,
Then wipe one eye,—the other sees
The plums and cherries on the trees.
Small bird-quick women pass me by
With sleeves that flutter airily,
And baskets blazing like a fire
With laughing fruits of my desire;
Plums sunburnt as the King of Spain,
Gold-cheeked as any Nubian,

With strawberries all goldy-freckled,
Pears fat as thrushes and as speckled . . .
Pursue them? . . . Yes, and squeeze a tear:
'Please spare poor Satyr one, my dear.'
'Be off, sir; go and steal your own!'
—Alas, poor Scarabombadon,
They'd rend his ruffles, stretch a twig,
Tear off a satyr's periwig!"

IX

THE MUSLIN GOWN

WITH spectacles that flash,
Striped foolscap hung with gold
And silver bells that clash,
(Bright rhetoric and cold),
In owl-dark garments goes the Rain,
Dull pedagogue, again.
And in my orchard wood
Small song-birds flock and fly,
Like cherubs brown and good,
When through the trees go I
Knee-deep within the dark-leaved sorrel.
Cherries red as bells of coral
Ring to see me come—
I, with my fruit-dark hair
As dark as any plum,
My summer gown as white as air
And frilled as any quick bird's there.
But oh, what shall I do?
Old Owl-wing's back from town—
He's skipping through dark trees: I know
He *hates* my summer gown!

X

MISS NETTYBUN AND THE SATYR'S CHILD

AS underneath the trees I pass
Through emerald shade on hot soft grass,
Petunia faces, glowing-hued
With heat, cast shadows hard and crude—
Green-velvety as leaves, and small
Fine hairs like grass pierce through them all.
But these are all asleep—asleep,
As through the schoolroom door I creep
In search of you, for you evade
All the advances I have made.
Come, Horace, you must take my hand.
This sulking state I will not stand!
But you shall feed on strawberry jam
At tea-time, if you cease to slam
The doors that open from our sense—
Through which I slipped to drag you hence!

XI

QUEEN VENUS AND THE CHOIR-BOY

(To Naomi Royde Smith)

THE apples grow like silver trumps
That red-cheeked fair-haired angels blow—
So clear their juice ; on trees in clumps,
Feathered as any bird, they grow.

A lady stood amid those crops—
Her voice was like a blue or pink
Glass window full of lollipops ;
Her words were very strange, I think :

" Prince Paris, too, a fair-haired boy
Plucked me an apple from dark trees ;
Since when their smoothness makes my joy ;
If you will pluck me one of these

I'll kiss you like a golden wind
As clear as any apples be."
And now she haunts my singing mind—
And oh, she will not set me free.

XII

THE APE SEES THE FAT WOMAN

AMONG the dark and brilliant leaves,
Where flowers seem tinsel firework-sheaves,
Blond barley-sugar children stare
Through shining apple-trees, and there

A lady like a golden wind
Whose hair like apples tumbles kind,

And whose bright name, so I believe,
Is sometimes Venus, sometimes Eve,

Stands, her face furrowed like my own
With thoughts wherefrom strange seeds are sown,

Whence, long since, stars for bright flowers grew
Like periwinkles pink and blue,—

THE APE SEES THE FAT WOMAN

(Queer impulses of bestial kind,
Flesh indivisible from mind.)

I, painted like the wooden sun,
Must hand-in-hand with angels run—

The tinsel angels of the booth
That lead poor yokels to the truth

Through raucous jokes, till we can see
That narrow long Eternity

Is but the whip's lash o'er our eyes—
Spurring to new vitalities.

XIII

THE APE WATCHES "AUNT SALLY"

THE apples are an angel's meat,
The shining dark leaves make clear-sweet
The juice; green wooden fruits alway
Drop on these flowers as white as day—

Clear angel-face on hairy stalk;
(Soul grown from flesh, an ape's young talk.)

And in this green and lovely ground
The Fair, world-like, turns round and round,

And bumpkins throw their pence to shed
Aunt Sally's crude-striped wooden head.

I do not care if men should throw
Round sun and moon to make me go,

(As bright as gold and silver pence) . . .
They cannot drive their own blood hence!

XIV

SPRINGING JACK

GREEN wooden leaves clap light away,
Severely practical, as they
Shelter the children, candy-pale.
The chestnut-candles flicker, fail. . . .

The showman's face is cubed clear as
The shapes reflected in a glass

Of water—(glog, glut, a ghost's speech
Fumbling for space from each to each).

The fusty showman fumbles, must
Fit in a particle of dust

The universe, for fear it gain
Its freedom from my box of brain.

Yet dust bears seeds that grow to grace
Behind my crude-striped wooden face

SPRINGING JACK

As I, a puppet tinsel-pink,
Leap on my springs, learn how to think,

Then like the trembling golden stalk
Of some long-petalled star, I walk

Through the dark heavens until dew
Falls on my eyes and sense thrills through.

XV

" TOURNEZ, TOURNEZ, BONS CHEVAUX DE BOIS "

TURN, turn again,
Ape's blood in each vein.
The people that pass
Seem castles of glass,
The old and the good,
Giraffes of blue wood ;
The soldier, the nurse,
Wooden face and a curse,
Are shadowed with plumage
Like birds by the gloomage.
Blond hair like a clown's,
The music floats, drowns
The creaking of ropes
The breaking of hopes.
The wheezing, the old,
Like harmoniums scold :
Go to Babylon, Rome,
The brain-cells called home,

"TOURNEZ, BONS CHEVAUX DE BOIS"

The grave, New Jerusalem,
Wrinkled Methusalem :
From our floating hair
Derived the first fair
And queer inspiration
Of music (the nation
Of bright-plumed trees
And harpy-shrill breeze).

. . . .

Turn, turn again,
Ape's blood in each vein.

SEVEN NURSERY SONGS

I

OLD LADY FLY-AWAY

OLD Lady Fly-Away
Lost her temper, night and day,
Took the bright moon's broom—
Swept round the attic room.
" Dear me, where *can* it be ?
Not a temper can I see ! "
Sighed the Moon upon the stair :
" Always look to see, dear,
When you ' put your foot down,'
Lest it crushes Babylon ;
Try to get it nearer home,
In fields of clover or in Rome ! "
Old Lady Fly-Away
Knew her temper would not stay,
So pretended not to hear—
Sweeping for it on the stair.

II

GREAT SNORING AND NORWICH

GREAT Snoring and Norwich
A dish of pease porridge !
The clock of Troy town
Strikes one o'clock ; brown
Honey-bees in the clover
Are half-the-seas-over,
And Time is a-boring
From here to Great Snoring.
But Time, the grey mouse,
Can't wake up the house,
For old King Priam
Is sleepy as I am !

III

FAT WILLIAM AND THE TRAINS

WHEN I should be at work, instead
I lie and kick for fun, in bed :
Down the narrow rails, hear trains
Go quick as other people's brains—
Hump their backs and snore and growl,
Grumble, rumble, tumble, prowl—
Bearing people, pink as pigs,
Through water-clear fields dancing jigs.
Like a whale among my pillows
Dash I, splash I, sheets in billows
As the trains toss spangled seas,
Like bright flags on the tusks of these.
How I envy those at work
When I can lie in bed and shirk.

IV

A PENNY FARE TO BABYLON

"A PENNY fare to Babylon,
A penny for each thought!"
"Oh, ma'am, no, ma'am,
Can't be bought!
The Sun gives pots of money,
The Moon, her bread and honey,
When humming like a clover-field
I go up to town.
Whitened by the Moon's flour,
All the birds I own,
Lest they be baked into a pie,
Are flown, dear, flown.
Though you whistle in the corridors
That dance into my brain—
Oh, ma'am, no, ma'am,
They will not come again."

V

THE BUTCHER'S SHOP

PANTALOON jumps in his bright
Butcher's shop, where red and white
Meat hangs up like clown's attire—
Laughs as shrill as grass or fire.
In his house sits Il Dottore,
In the rickety top story
Plays a mandoline to please
Coral bells on cherry trees. . . .
But the bees have left his bonnet
For the meat; they buzz upon it—
Goldy summer lights—they hover
Like the bees upon red clover,
Flying straight into the shop,
Full of facts, where theories stop.

VI

THE KING OF CHINA'S DAUGHTER

THE King of China's daughter,
She never would love me
Though I hung my cap and bells upon
Her nutmeg tree.
For oranges and lemons,
The stars in bright blue air,
(I stole them long ago, my dear)
Were dangling there.
The Moon did give me silver pence,
The Sun did give me gold,
And both together softly blew
And made my porridge cold;
But the King of China's daughter
Pretended not to see
When I hung my cap and bells upon
Her nutmeg tree.

OLD KING PTOLEMY

OLD King Ptolemy
Climbed the stair
Into the attic
Of Anywhere.
Old King Ptolemy
Sulked to bed ;
Maids cleared up his toys—
" Broken," they said.
" The King's in a temper,
The King's in a pet,"
Wriggling their necks like geese—
" Oh, what a fret ! "
The Struwwelpeter
Round-eyed Sun,
Rocked on his rocking-horse
Half in fun,—
Rocked on the landing,
Rocked on the stair :
" Babylon's empty,
The cupboard is bare. . . .

King Ptolemy's snoring
Sounds on the breeze
Like the sound of fruit growing
On mulberry trees."

PEDAGOGUES AND FLOWER-SHOWS

I

TALL cranes with wooden bodices
Stuffed full of shadow odyssies,

They hiss like geese through school-
room bars
At the bright flower-show of the stars.

The houses (children's bricks) float by
On swords of moonshine, cry and sigh.

The schoolmen spray with glittering laughter
This flower-show, budding strangely after.

" Our map-like cheeks are painted red
Where sawdust gods were pierced and bled

" By all this moonshine, and we feel
Blood should be dry,"—Erazureel

Cried ; " Blue, pink, yellow planets, bright
Flowers frilled as seas breathe in the night ;

These frillèd pinks, so neat and nice,
We'll teach to turn the world to ice.

Our science then can soon inure
The stars to blossom from manure ;

The world will be all map-like, plain
As our lined cheeks, and once again

The soul (moot point) will scarce intrude
Its lack of depth and magnitude ! "

PEDAGOGUES AND FLOWER-SHOWS

II

What the Professor said to the Editor of "Wheels"

OLD Professor Goosecap
Watched the planet's flower-show.
"Pedagogues well-drilled, mayhap,
Marshalled in a row,
Can perceive in China asters
Half a hemisphere's disasters,
With rays to pierce the fourth dimension:
Come, limit it to our declension!
Pedagogues, through schoolroom bars,
Must thrust their faces like a map
Crownèd with a dunce's cap,
To hiss like geese at the stars,
And crush with wooden toe——
All growing,
And blowing,
These Canterbury bells as they blow,
These silvery bells in a row!"

SWITCHBACK

BY the blue wooden sea,
Curling laboriously,
Coral and amber grots
(Cherries and apricots),
Ribbons of noisy heat,
Binding them head and feet,
Horses as fat as plums
Snort as each bumpkin comes.
Giggles like towers of glass
(Pink and blue spirals) pass,
Oh, how the Vacancy
Laughed at them rushing by!
" Turn again, flesh and brain,
Only yourselves again!
How far above the Ape,
Differing in each shape,
You with your regular,
Meaningless circles are! "

TRAMS

CASTLES of crystal,
Castles of wood,
Moving on pulleys
Just as you should!
See the gay people
Flaunting like flags,
Bells in the steeple,
Sky all in rags.
Bright as a parrot
Flaunts the gay heat—
Songs in the garret,
Fruit in the street;
Plump as a cherry,
Red as a rose,
Old Mother Berry—
Blowing her nose!

BANK HOLIDAY

I

THE houses on a see-saw rush
In the giddy sun's hard spectrum, push

The noisy heat's machinery;
Like flags of coloured heat they fly.

The wooden ripples of the smiles
Suck down the houses, then at whiles,

Grown suctioned like an octopus,
They throw them up again at us,

As we rush by on coloured bars
Of sense, vibrating flower-hued stars,

With lips like velvet drinks and winds
That bring strange Peris to our minds.

BANK HOLIDAY

II

SEAS are roaring like a lion ; with their
wavy flocks Zion,
Noses like a scimitar,
Hair a brassy bar
Come
To
The sun's drum ; through
Light green waters swim their daughters, lashing
with their eel-sleek-locks
The furred
Heads
Of mermaids that occurred,
Sinking to their cheap beds.
Blurred
Legs, like trunks of tropical
Plants, rise up and, over all,
Green as a conservatory,
Is the light . . . another story. . . .
It has grown too late for life :
Put on your gloves and take a drive !

SMALL TALK

I

UPON the noon Cassandra died
The harpy preened itself outside.

Bank Holiday put forth its glamour,
And in the wayside station's clamour

We found the café at the rear,
And sat and drank our Pilsener beer.

Words smeared upon our wooden faces
Now paint them into queer grimaces;

The crackling greeneries that spirt
Like fireworks, mock our souls inert,

And we seem feathered like a bird
Among those shadows scarcely heard.

Beneath her shade-ribbed switchback mane
The harpy, breasted like a train,

SMALL TALK I

Was haggling with a farmer's wife :
" Fresh harpy's eggs, no trace of life."

Miss Sitwell, cross and white as chalk,
Was indisposed for the small talk,

Since, peering through a shadowed door,
She saw Cassandra on the floor.

SMALL TALK

II

UPON the noon
Cassandra died,
Harpy soon
Screeched outside.
Gardener Jupp,
In his shed,
Counted wooden
Carrots red.
Black shades pass,
Dead-stiff there,
On green baize grass—
Drink his beer.
Bumpkin turnip,
Mask limp-locked,
White sun frights
The gardener shocked.
Harpy creaked
Her limbs again :
" I think, she squeaked,
It's going to rain ! "

DANSONS LA GIGUE

DANCE the jig, whirl
In the street, girl.
Rush up and down,
Houses, to town—
On the see-saw
Made out of raw
Hot yellow rays,
Crude edges of days.
Dance the jig, whirl—
Like your blond curl !
Oh ! it is fine to-day,
On this Bank Holiday !
Sound of young feet
Comes down the street . . .
Never again
Pleasure or pain. . . .
Dance the jig, whirl
In the street, girl.
Do the dead ache
In summer, to slake

Their thirst of love ?—Hush,—
No tears to gush,
My soul is of mud,
Cannot weep blood. . . .

. . . .

Dance the jig, dance the jig,—
Dance the jig, girl.

MESSALINA AT MARGATE

THE tents are coloured like a child's balloons;
They swell upon the air like August moons
Anchored by waters paler than a pearl;
The airs like rain-wet shrinking petals curl

Beneath the rainbow lights of noon that fill
The open calyx with the faintest thrill,
Then break in airy bubbles on the sense
Like sounds upheld in exquisite suspense.

In grande toilette, and with a parasol
Bright-fringèd as the noonday sun, (that fool
Of beauty,) Messalina promenades.
A crinoline keeps off the other shades:

Her grape-black hair casts shadows deep as death;
All curled and high, yet stirring at Time's breath.
The powder on her face is shuddering white
As dust of æons seen in heaven's light.

MESSALINA AT MARGATE

She leaves the sands, where in tents striped like fruits
The dancers whirl like winds to airy flutes,
And music, soother than the pulp of pearls
Whose sweetness decks the swan-white syren girls,

In air-pale waves like water, has the sheen
Of mirrors, floats like flower-wing'd stars.—O spleen !
Leave Regent's Park and quit society
Only to find this immorality !

So now she goes to church, where bonnets steam
Like incense, and the painted windows seem
Naught but a coloured veil stupidity
Had wrought to clothe her dumb soliloquy :

" There's comfort in old age : the steam of food
Ascending like the rich man's soul to God ;
And little words that crackle as they went,
How such and such a life was evil spent,

" Until they make a fire to warm our hands.
For Time has wrapp'd the heart in swaddling bands,
But yet they could not save it from the cold.—
The soul's a pander grown ; for she has sold

MESSALINA AT MARGATE

"My body to the Church ; does nicely now.
Oh ! Soul has much to learn from flesh, I vow."
Thus Messalina, grown both old and fat,—
The Church's parrot now, and dull at that !

PEDAGOGUES

THE air is like a jarring bell
That jangles words it cannot spell,
And black as Fate, the iron trees
Stretch thirstily to catch the breeze.

The fat leaves pat the shrinking air ;
The hot sun's patronising stare
Rouses the stout flies from content
To some small show of sentiment.

Beneath the terrace shines the green
Metallic strip of sea, and sheen
Of sands, where folk flaunt parrot-bright
With rags and tags of noisy light.

The brass band's snorting stabs the sky
And tears the yielding vacancy—
The imbecile and smiling blue
Until fresh meaning trickles through ;

And slowly we perambulate
With spectacles that concentrate,
In one short hour, Eternity,
In one small lens, Infinity.

With children, our primeval curse,
We overrun the universe—
Beneath the giddy lights of noon,
White as a tired August moon.

The air is like a jarring bell
That jangles words it cannot spell,
And black as Fate, the iron trees
Stretch thirstily to catch the breeze.

SONG FROM "THE QUEEN OF PALMYRA"

AND shall we never find those diamonds bright
That were the fawn-queen of Palmyra's eyes?—
Ah, dark hot jewels lie hidden from the sight
Beneath dark palm-trees where the river sighs
Beyond the tomb of young eternities;
And in the desert, lonely flowers weep—
The clouds have such long hair—that tangles Sleep.

THE CHOIR-BOY RIDES ON THE SWITCHBACK

IN the fruit-ripe heat of afternoon
Each muslined school-child seems a moon;
And in the tents, those lazy waves
From out the echoing coral caves

Of light, like Venus from the sea
The clown seems, blond hair floating free.

The switchback, with its noisy run,
Is turning like the wooden sun

As he rides on his rocking-horse
All Struwwelpeter-haired; we course

On sands as moist as sugar-cane,
And the Fat Woman's face and mane

Are sometimes dappled by the shade
Into the likeness of some maid

CHOIR-BOY RIDES ON THE SWITCHBACK

Long dead . . . those golden shadows fell
On Cressid or Alaciel.

The beggar-tunes on horseback ride,
With cheeks as pink as Angels',—glide

Through Babylon, Chicago, Troy,
And Black Man's Land. Each golden boy

Blows silver trumpets over these,
As clear as apples on the trees.

I will go home and pack my pride,
Then with these beggar-tunes I'll ride—

For all the hymns I try to sing
Are but Love's beggars shivering

In thorny thickets where one sees
Stars grow for wild wet raspberries.

APRICOT JAM

BENEATH the dancing, glancing green
The tea is spread amid the sheen
Of pince-nez (glints of thought); thus seen,
In sharp reflections only, brain
Perceives the world all flat and plain
In rounded segments, joy and pain.
The parasols dance like the sun,
Cast wavering nets of shade that run
Across the chattering table's fun,
The laughing faces, and across
Half-shadowed faces looking cross,
And black hair with a bird-bright gloss.
The flashing children stayed and checked,
Smooth india-rubber leaves reflect
Their parrot-green on circumspect
Glazed china, where the negroid tea
Reflects the world's obscurity
In high lights such as pince-nez see.

And all the sheen of shadows feather
Muslin frocks like plumes ; together,
In the hot and flashing weather,
Bird-high voices shrill and chatter
With the high and glinting clatter
Tea-cups make, and whispered patter—
(Listen, and you'll get a slap !)
Worlds are small as any map,
And life will come our way—mayhap.

STOPPING PLACE

THE world grows furry, grunts with sleep . . .
But I must on the surface keep.
The jolting of the train to me
Seems some primeval vertebræ
Attached by life-nerves to my brain—
Reactionary once again,
So that I see shapes crude and new
And ordered,—with some end in view,
No longer with the horny eyes
Of other people's memories.
Through highly varnished yellow heat,
As through a lens that does not fit,
The faces jolt in cubes, and I
Perceive their odd solidity
And lack of meaning absolute :
For why should noses thus protrude,
And to what purpose can relate
Each hair so oddly separate ?
Anchored against the puff of breeze,
As shallow as the crude blue seas,

STOPPING PLACE

The coloured blocks and cubes of faces
Seem Noah's arks that shelter races
Of far absurdities to breed
Their queer kind after we are dead.
Blue wooden foliage creaks with heat
And there are woollen buns to eat—
Bright-varnished buns to touch and see
And, black as an Inferno, tea.
Then (Recketts' blue) a puff of wind. . . .
Heredity regains my mind
And I am sitting in the train
While thought becomes like flesh,—the brain
Not independent, but derived
From hairy matter that half lived—
Identities not round or whole.
A questing beast who thirsts for soul,
The furry vegetation there—
Purring with heat, sucks in the air ;
And dust that's gathered in the train,
Protecting flesh, seems almost brain—
(That horny substance altering sight) ;
How strange, intangible is light
Whence all is born, and yet by touch
We live,—the rest is not worth much. . . .
Once more the world grows furred with sleep,—
But I must on the surface keep

STOPPING PLACE

While mammoths from the heat are born—
Great clumsy trains with tusk and horn
Whereon the world's too sudden tossed
Through frondage of our mind, and lost.

PORTRAIT OF A BARMAID

METALLIC waves of people jar
Through crackling green toward the bar
Where on the tables, chattering-white,
The sharp drinks quarrel with the light.

Those coloured muslin blinds the smiles
Shroud wooden faces in their wiles—

Sometimes they splash like water (you
Yourself reflected in their hue).

The conversation, loud and bright,
Seems spinal bars of shunting light

In firework-spirting greenery,
O complicate machinery

For building Babel, iron crane
Beneath your hair, that blue-ribbed mane

PORTRAIT OF A BARMAID

In noise and murder like the sea
Without its mutability

Outside the bar, where jangling heat
Seems out of tune and off the beat,

A concertina's glycerine
Exudes and mirrors in the green

Your soul, pure glucose edged with hints
Of tentative and half-soiled tints.

MATERIALISM; OR, PASTOR ——— TAKES THE RESTAURANT CAR FOR HEAVEN

UPON sharp floods of noise there glide
The red-brick houses, float, collide

With aspidestras, trains on steel
That lead us not to what we feel.

Hot glassy lights fill up the gloom
As water an aquarium,—

All mirror-bright; beneath these seen,
Our faces coloured by their sheen,

Seem objects under water, bent
By each bright-hued advertisement

Whose words are stamped upon our skin
As though the heat had burnt them in.

MATERIALISM

The jolting of the train that made
All objects coloured bars of shade,

Projects them sideways till they split
Splinters fron eyeballs as they flit.

Down endless tubes of throats we squeeze
Our words, lymphatic paint to please

Our sense of neatness, neutralize
The overtint and oversize.

I think it true that Heaven should be
A narrow train for you and me,

Where we perpetually must haunt
The moving oblique restaurant

And feed on foods of other minds
Behind the hot and dusty blinds.

THÄIS IN HEAVEN

WHEN you lay dying fast, you said—
And, weeping, were not comforted:
"Look through this paper world! I see

The lights of Heaven burn like gold
The other side; and Souls are sold
For these, yet only flesh, sold we!"

And then you died and went to bliss.—
I'm curious now to know if love
Is really Heaven—where *you* rove.—
Your kind of love . . . or mine, Thaïs?

And is there still the clinging mud?
I think it drowned your soul like wine.
And do the stars like street-lamps shine,
Gilding the gutters where you stood,

And lighting up your small face where
Thin powder, like a trail of dust,
Shows the mortality of lust . . .
Still black as hissing rain, your hair?

Your body had become your soul. . . .
Thaïs,—do spirits crumble whole?

FOUR NOCTURNES

I

PROCESSIONS

WITHIN the long black avenues of Night
Go pageants of delight,

With masks of glass the night has stained with wine,
Hair lifted like a vine ;—

And all the coloured curtains of the air
Were fluttered. Passing there,

The sounds seemed warring suns ; and music flowed
As blood ; the mask'd lamps showed

Tall houses light had gilded like despair :
Black windows, gaping there.

Through all the rainbow spaces of our laughter
Those pageants followed after;

The negress Night, within her house of glass
Watched the processions pass.

II

GAIETY

BLOW out the candles. Let the dance begin.
Already, pale as Sin,

The candles weep and pry like living things . . .
They dance, who have no wings.

More vast and black than endless sleep, this room.
Time beats his empty drum

Whose hollow sound is echoed in our eyes—
Deep wells where no moon lies.

A crumpled paper mask hides every face—
Creased to a smile of grace,

With eyelids gilded, so the bitter tears
Make music for men's ears.

These masks, some coloured like an August moon,
Or white, as sands that swoon

Within Time's hour-glass, some as grey as rain,—
Still mimic joy and pain.

Thin pointed rags and tags edge our attire . . .
Bright plumes ? . . . or tongues of fire,

Whose painted laughter cracks the gilded sky
Of this flat empery

That has no soil where any flower may root,
Nor rest for weary foot,

But endless leagues of mirror : such the ground
That no horizons bound,—

Carved topaz water ;—sound a mirror seems !
O ! nakedness of dreams

Beneath the blinding radiance of hot skies
Where no sun lives or dies.

. . . . .

GAIETY

Now that the dusty, creaking curtain, Day,
Is folded, laid away,

Each masked dancer is both piercèd Heart
And Dream, its poiniard.

Small winds creep from Infinity. . . . A flame
Our blown hair, white as shame.

Those seeds of worlds, the stars, are nought but blown
Red tinsel from a Clown ;

The candles, living things to dance and pry :
Out ! hard Reality !

III

VACUUM

BLOWN through the leaden circles of our hell,
Each wisp of soul, tattered by winds of lust,
Clawed at the voices, like a beaten bell.
No movement ever raised the lifeless dust,

As, blown beneath the night's enormous pall,
We call to you with goatish prance and paces:
Our lips are red as nights of festival
And hell has dyed its fires upon our faces.

These barren bodies may no children breed
To quench the sun with their corrupted breath
Save these our hearts, our breasts, our bodies feed—
The fruit of love like ours, the worms of death.

VACUUM

Within our brain the darkness slowly fell :
Our eyes' dark vacuum reflects no days—
No voice, no sight, no thought within our hell—
But only flesh our loneliness allays.

IV

"ET L'ON ENTEND À PEINE LEURS PAROLES"

MONOTONOUSLY fell the rain,
Like thoughts within an empty brain;
The lolling weeds that fattened there
Absorbed the broken lifeless air.

"Do those dim eyes still hold a flame
That leaps to Heaven at my name?"

"Mine eyes would hold God's face in sight;
But your lips burned away the light."

"Within your brain the blood runs high?"
"You came like thought; you licked it dry."

"Oh, we have burnt our souls with lust
Till they are whiter than the dust . . .

Now are they white as purity ? "
" You blind mine eyes . . . I cannot see."

" I am so tired—I fain would creep
To hide within your heart and weep."

" My heart is dust . . . no tears to shed."
" But carrion lives—it lives "—I said.

TREATS

I

FUNERALS

BENEATH umbrellas I can see
Pink faces sheened with stupidity,
With whiskers spirting from them, (days
Of boredom, black and sentient rays

From other personalities.)
And, mourners too, white-bearded seas

Walk slowly by them as they come,
Sing hymns to the wind's harmonium.

Old men shake hands ; their clawing grasp
Seems like a door without a clasp—

That gapes on slow black emptiness. . . .
Now,—vanished is her cracked black dress,

FUNERALS

The house grows tall from vacancy,
And in the kitchen I take tea

While the furry sun creeps out—that raw
Life,—sheathes its murderous claw

And lets its tongue slink out to lap
The silence—(a slow-leaking tap). . . .

II

THE COUNTY CALLS

THEY came upon us like a train—
A rush, a scream, then gone again!
With bodies like a continent
Encased in silken seas, they went

And came and called and took their tea
And patronised the Deity
Who copies their munificence
With creditable heart and sense.

Each face a plaster monument
For some belovèd aliment,
Whose everlasting sleep they deign
To cradle in the Great Inane;

Each tongue, a noisy clockwork bell
To toll the passing hour that fell;
Each hat, an architect's device
For building churches, cheap and nice.

THE COUNTY CALLS

I saw the County Families
Advance and sit and take their teas ;
I saw the County gaze askance
At my thin insignificance :

Small thoughts like frightened fishes glide
Beneath their eyes' pale glassy tide :
They said : " Poor thing ! we must be nice ! "
They said : " We know your father ! "—twice.

III

SOLO FOR EAR-TRUMPET

THE carriage brushes through the bright
Leaves (violent jets from life to light).
Strong polished speed is plunging, heaves
Between the showers of bright hot leaves.
The window-glasses glaze our faces
And jarr them to the very basis,—
But they could never put a polish
Upon my manners, or abolish
My most distinct disinclination
For calling on a rich relation!
In her house, bulwark built between
The life man lives and visions seen,—
The sunlight hiccups white as chalk,
Grown drunk with emptiness of talk,
And silence hisses like a snake,
Invertebrate and rattling ache.

. . . . .

Till suddenly, Eternity
Drowns all the houses like a sea,

SOLO FOR EAR-TRUMPET

And down the street the Trump of Doom
Blares,—barely shakes this drawing-room
Where raw-edged shadows sting forlorn
As dank dark nettles. Down the horn
Of her ear-trumpet I convey
The news that: "It is Judgment Day!"
"Speak louder; I don't catch, my dear."
I roared: "*It is the Trump we hear!*"
"The *What*?"—"The TRUMP!" . . . "I
shall complain—
The boy-scouts practising again!"

ANTIC HAY

HOW like a lusty satyr, the hot sun
Doth in his orbit run
O'er rivers and the light blue hills of noon,
And where the white still moon
Sleeps in the lovely woodlands of the light.
Made drunken with his might,
Like flames the goat-foot satyrs leap and fling
The blossom'd beans of Spring.
The oreads leave their swan-like fountains, bells
Of foam, and dark wood-wells,
And grasses where the pale dew lovelorn lies
And like an echo dies.
The river-gods are tossing their blue manes
Still wet with brine ; the reins
Lie loosely on their plunging horses ; earth
Shakes with the storm of mirth ;
And all the cloudy castles of the air
Are bathed with radiance. There,

ANTIC HAY

Beneath dark chestnut trees, King Pan doth sport
With all his hornèd court.
Their goat-feet clattering to the oaten tune
That cools the heat of noon
Like water gurgling; hoofs all wreath'd with flowers,
Wild as the dew-pale hours,
The clownish satyrs dance the antic hay;
They butt with horns and sway,
While laughing leaves, like smitten cymbals thrill
Their sunburnt dance; until
The light falls like a rain of panick'd leaves
Through the gold heart of eves.
O'er misty fields, mild Dian's old faint horn
Bloweth a sound forlorn.
Then from their hives with palest flowers bedight,
The yellow bees take flight—
Whirling where old Silenus tries to sing
Unto his hornèd King
—Feeding upon gold-freckled strawberries—
And sting the poor fat fool until he cries.

LULLABY

GOLDEN night-airs lull his eyes,
Starlight come not where Love lies,
Lest your faint light touch his wings
Who swiftly comes and swiftly flies ;
Lovers, wake him not with sighs,
But list where Philomela sings
Lullaby.

Dreams come tiptoe to his bed,
Dim fantastic wings outspread
To fan his pretty sleeping eyes.
Upon my breast he laid his head
(On lilies white heap roses red) ;
Hushed in my maiden heart, Love lies
A-sleeping.

WATER MUSIC

FROM Florence and from Venice,
Like silver swans at noon,
That silken dim winds menace—
Each barque a drownèd moon,
I'll bring you freights of amber,
Perfumèd like the rose,
To build your sleeping chamber,
And song-birds for your close;
Faint stars to go a-singing,
Like fluttering nightingales
From golden cages winging,
When, Love, your tir'd wing fails.
And as we come a-rowing,
Great rainbows rise and swing
Like haughty peacocks bowing
In the gardens of the King.

THE WEB OF EROS

WITHIN your magic web of hair lies furled
The fire and splendour of the ancient world;
The dire gold of the comet's wind-blown hair,
The songs that turned to gold the evening air
When all the stars of heaven sang for joy;
The flames that burnt the cloud-high city Troy;
The mænad fire of spring on the cold earth,
The myrrh-lit flames that gave both life and birth
To the soul-Phœnix, and the star-bright shower
That came to Danæ in her brazen tower.
Within your burning web of hair lies furled
The fire and splendour of the ancient world.

DROWNED SUNS

THE swans more white than those forgotten fair
Who ruled the kingdoms that of old-time were,
Within the sunset water deeply gaze
As though they sought some beautiful dim face,
The youth of all the world ; or pale lost gems,
And crystal shimmering diadems,
The moon for ever seeks in woodland streams
To deck her cool faint beauty ; thus in dreams,
Belov'd, I seek lost suns within your eyes
And find but wrecks of love's gold argosies.

THE SPIDER

THE fat light clings upon my skin,
Like grease that slowly forms a thin
And foul white film ; so close it lies,
It feeds upon my lips and eyes.

The black fly hits the window-pane
That shuts its dirty body in ;
So once, his spirit fought to quit
The body that imprisoned it.

He always seemed so fond of me,
Until one day he chanced to see
My head, a little on one side,
Loll softly as if I had died.

Since then, he rarely looked my way,
Though he could never know what lay
Within my brain ; though iron his will,
I thought, he's young and teachable.

And often, as I took my drink,
I chuckled in my heart to think
Whose dark blood ran within his veins :
You see, it spared me half my pains.

The time was very long until
I had the chance to work my will ;
Once seen, the way was clear as light,
A father's patience infinite.

He always was so sensitive ;
But soon I taught him how to live
With each day, just a patch of white,
A blinded patch of black, each night.

Each day he watched my gaiety.
It's very difficult to die
When one is young. . . . I pitied him,
The glass I filled up to the brim,

His shaking fingers scarce could hold ;
His limbs were trembling as with cold. . . .
I waited till from night and day
All meaning I had wiped away,

And then I gave it him again ;
The wine made heaven in his brain.
Then spider-like, the kindly wine
Thrust tentacles through every vein,

And knotted him so very fast
I knew I had him safe at last.
And sometimes in the dawn, I'd creep
To watch him as he lay asleep,

And each time, see my son's face grown
In some blurred line, more like my own.
A crumpled rag, he lies all night
Until the first white smear of light ;

And sleep is but an empty hole . . .
No place for him to hide his soul,
No outlet there to set him free :
He never can escape from me.

Yet still I never know what thought,
All fly-like, in his mind lies caught :
His face seems some half-spoken word
Forgot again as soon as heard,

Beneath the livid skin of light ;
Oh, just an empty space of white,
Now all the meaning's gone. I'll sit
A little while, and stare at it.

THE DRUNKARD

THIS black tower drinks the blinding light.
Strange windows livid white,

Tremble beneath the curse of God.
Yet living weeds still nod

To the huge sun, a devil's eye
That tracks the souls that die.

The clock beats like the heart of Doom
Within the narrow room ;

And whispering with some ghastly air
The curtains float and stir.

But still she never speaks a word ;
I think she hardly heard

When I with reeling footsteps came
And softly spoke her name.

But yet she does not sleep. Her eyes
Still watch in wide surprise

The thirsty knife that pitied her ;
But those lids never stir,

Though creeping Fear still gnaws like pain
The hollow of her brain.

She must have some sly plan, the cheat,
To lie so still. The beat

That once throbbed like a muffled drum
With fear to hear me come,

Now never sounds when I creep nigh.
Oh ! she was always sly.

And if to spite her, I dared steal
Behind her bed, and feel

With fumbling fingers for her heart . . .
Ere I could touch the smart,

Once more wild shriek on shriek would tear
The dumb and shuddering air. . . .

And still she never speaks to me.
She only smiles to see

How in dark corners secret-sly
New-born Eternity,

All spider-like, doth spin and cast
Strange threads to hold Time fast.

THE MOTHER

I

OUR dreams create the babes we bear ;
Our beauty goes to make them fair.
We give them all we have of good,
Our blood to drink, our hearts for food ;

And in our souls they lie and rest
Until upon their mother's breast,
So innocent and sweet they lie.
They live to curse us ; then they die.

When he was born, it seemed the spring
Had come again with birds to sing
And blossoms dancing in the sun
Where streams released from winter run.

His sunlit hair was all my gold,
His loving eyes my wealth untold ;
All heaven was hid within my breast
Whereon my child was laid to rest.

He grew to manhood. Then one came
False-hearted as Hell's blackest shame,
To steal my child from me, and thrust
The soul I loved down to the dust.

Her hungry, wicked lips were red
As that dark blood my son's hand shed.
Her eyes were black as Hell's own night,
Her ice-cold breast was winter-white.

I had put by a little gold
To bury me when I was cold.
Her fangèd, wanton kiss to buy
My son's love willed that I should die.

The gold was hid beneath my bed ;
So little, and my weary head
Was all the guard it had. They lie
So quiet and still who soon must die.

He stole to kill me while I slept—
The little son, who never wept
But that I kissed his tears away
So fast, his weeping seemed but play.

So light his footfall, yet I heard
Its echo in my heart, and stirred
From out my weary sleep to see
My child's face bending over me.

The wicked knife flashed serpent-wise.—
Yet I saw nothing but his eyes,
And heard one little word he said
Go echoing down among the Dead.

II

They say the Dead may never dream.
But yet I heard my pierced heart scream
His name within the dark. They lie
Who say the Dead can ever die.

For in the grave I may not sleep
For dreaming that I hear him weep.
And in the dark, my dead hands grope
In search of him. O barren hope!

I cannot draw his head to rest
Deep down upon my wounded breast . . .
He gave the breast that fed him well
To suckle the small worms of Hell.

The little wicked thoughts that fed
Upon the weary helpless Dead . . .
They whispered o'er my broken heart,
They stuck their fangs deep in the smart.

" The child she bore with bloody sweat
And agony has paid his debt.
Through that bleak face the stark winds play ;
The crows have chased his soul away.

" His body is a blackened rag
Upon the tree—a monstrous flag."
Thus one worm to the other saith.
Those slow mean servitors of Death,

They chuckling said : " Your soul, grown blind
With anguish, is the shrieking Wind
That blows the flame that never dies
About his empty, lidless eyes."

I tore them from my heart. I said :
" The life-blood that my son's hand shed,
That from my broken heart outburst,
I'd give again, to quench his thirst.

" He did no sin. But cold blind earth
The body was that gave him birth.
All mine, all mine the sin ; the love
I bore him was not deep enough."

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